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AUTHOR Lind, Agneta; Foss, Mark
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the literacy education work being done by two agencies, the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) and the Canadian Organization for Development through Education (CODE). SIDA strives to promote economic growth, economic and social equality, economic and political independence, democratic development, the use of renewable natural resources, and protection of the environment. Bilateral assistance is distributed between sectors in a process of country programming in which the recipient country sets the preferences and priorities of how Swedish assistance should be used. In 1988-89, SIDA was involved in assisting projects and programs in 11 countries. SIDA supports primary education by supplying textbooks and other teaching materials, training, and management help. Assistance to adult literacy education has mainly been used for printing equipment, transportation, renovation, local financing of literacy programs, and honoraria to teachers. CODE tries to enable people to learn by developing partnerships that provide resources for learning, encourage self-reliance, and promote awareness and understanding. CODE sends books, paper for local publishing, equipment, supplies, and funds for educational projects in developing nations. The key to CODE's growth has been partnerships, long-term planning, and enabling behavior. (KC)

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LITERACY LESSONS

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INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR

International co-operation in literacy: two good examples

by Agneta Lind (SIDA) and Mark Foss (CODE)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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PART I: Swedish International Development Authority

INTRODUCTION

The following account of Sweden's literacy-promoting assistance to developing countries describes the bilateral support to primary education and adult literacy channelled by the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA).

The five objectives of SIDA are to promote

(1) economic growth;
(2) economic and social equality;
(3) economic and political independence;
(4) democratic development;
(5) and the use of renewable natural resources and protection of the environment.

Bilateral assistance is distributed between sectors in a process of country programming in which the recipient country sets the preferences and priorities of how Swedish assistance should be utilized. Thus the recipient government can integrate external assistance into its overall development strategy. Country programming is based on the idea of assistance as a contribution to each country's own efforts to tackle its problems of development, and not as a substitute for such efforts.

BILATERAL ASSISTANCE IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

In 1988/89 the Education Division of SIDA was involved in assisting projects and programmes in eleven of seventeen programme countries. Total disbursements amounted to 246 million SEK in 1987/88 (ca. US $38 million), which corresponds to about 5% of the total budget for Swedish bilateral development assistance. Sixty-six per cent of bilateral aid for education is directed to basic education, which means primary education and adult literacy.

CONTENT OF SIDA'S SUPPORT TO BASIC EDUCATION

SIDA's support to education is based on sector cooperation agreements normally covering three years. The implementation of these agreements is reviewed each year. The sector support procedures introduced in the early 1970s have demonstrated considerable flexibility, allowing, for example, reallocation of funds between projects, as well as between various items in a project budget. Literacy programmes usually consist mainly of local costs, for example honoraria for literacy workers, costs of transport and local training courses, and it has been possible to meet such costs under the sector programmes.

Primary education

The most wide-spread component of SIDA's support to primary education consists of the entire chain of activities involved in supplying schools with textbooks and other teaching material. This includes training and

equipment needed for curriculum development, publishing and printing of textbooks, including paper supply. It also comprises management and equipment for distribution purposes, including vehicles and storage facilities. Personnel, both long- and short-term, are to some extent included. SIDA's support for primary education also includes the construction and equipping of primary schools, teacher training, educational planning and some special education.

Adult literacy and post-literacy

In Mozambique and Botswana, the actual literacy programme still mainly receives Swedish support. In the United Republic of Tanzania and Ethiopia, Sweden's assistance is presently concentrated on post-literacy programmes. In the United Republic of Tanzania, adult education support is also provided to the Folk Development Colleges for early leavers and adults who have completed literacy programmes. Assistance to adult literacy education has mainly been used for the following components:

- equipment for the production of textbooks and rural newspapers;
- means of transport;
- renovation of and equipment for training centres;
- local financing of literacy activities, such as training of instructors, writers' workshops, printing and distribution of teaching material, purchase of books for rural libraries;
- honoraria to instructors.

LESSONS FROM SWEDISH BILATERAL ASSISTANCE TO LITERACY PROGRAMMES

Experience the world over seems to indicate that most successful literacy programmes have been intimately linked to the socio-cultural, economic and political context. The state has been the prime mover in promoting and organizing large-scale literacy programmes which have managed to reduce the overall national illiteracy rate. National commitment and political priority for literacy have been crucial for attaining such positive results. Above all, the successful literacy programmes have been part of a wider process of mobilization among the people. The successes achieved have not primarily been a question of the number of books printed, rural libraries in operation or vehicles supplied. Although all these components certainly are required for a literacy programme, they can never substitute for or cause mobilization of the people, nor determine the programme contents or the implementation approach. External assistance can play an important role, given that the project planning carefully responds to local needs and national priorities. A great deal of sensitivity and flexibility is required on the part of donor agencies.

Donors easily fall into the trap of being overly influential in their assistance to specific projects. Preference is given to projects which are limited in scope, space and time, and which can be budgeted in some detail before being approved. Decision-making procedures within donor agencies are based on this notion of a project, as in the image of foreign assistance among the general public in the donor countries. Donors, furthermore, often look at projects as investments requiring capital costs only, preferably the foreign exchange

component. Literacy projects usually do not meet these criteria, and consequently receive very little support. They are widely spread geographically, and more difficult to plan and cost in detail. They require support to cover local recurrent costs rather than capital costs.

Swedish technical assistance has constituted only a small fraction of the support provided to literacy programmes. One reason is the possible contradiction between the need for local mobilization and external assistance. Another factor is the limited relevant Swedish experience in the field of literacy.

SWEDEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR

SIDA puts special emphasis on support for a certain number of activities connected with International Literacy Year (ILY) in order to stress the need to mobilize more resources and to establish priorities in favour of literacy, given that this represents a worldwide problem and constitutes as much a question of human rights as it does of social justice. For example, some associated experts have been recruited and financed to support the ILY Secretariat. A financial contribution for a period of three years has been granted to the work of the International Task Force on Literacy. Other SIDA funds have been released for studies and research activities to encourage the international transfer of acquired experience in the field of adult literacy.

THE NEED TO MOBILIZE MORE RESOURCES AND PRIORITIES FOR LITERACY

In the present situation of increasing debt burdens and economic constraints in many Third World countries, access to basic education and literacy is being undermined. The economic crisic has implied a serious dilemma for many Third World states. They are forced to balance short-term stabilization measures, which usually mean drastic spending cuts, not least in the education budget, with long-term investments in education and training, necessary for overall economic and social development.

SIDA's policy on educational assistance has stressed that educational development and planning is a national social and political process, and should be analysed as such. Success depends in the final analysis on each country's ability to find political solutions to complex educational problems and resource shortages. In its guidelines for educational assistance, SIDA has concluded that great consideration must be given to the special characteristics and varying conditions of developing countries. In SIDA's bilateral assistance to literacy education for children and adults, there has been a growing emphasis on rendering existing systems more effective.The need for quality improvements, such as in-service teacher training, provision of textbooks for all, and improvement of planning practices, have been stressed.

As previously stated, achievements in literacy education are not primarily determined by external assistance. However, literacy activities require allocation of sufficient resources whose amount must be calculated not only on the basis of the literacy programme as such, but also in terms of providing follow-up and accessible

reading material in sufficient quantity for new literates. It is therefore important not to consider adult literacy as a cheap and easy road to education and development. It is often difficult to avoid high drop-out rates among learners and tutors in literacy programmes. Other risks involved are the setting of unrealistically high literacy objectives, resulting in high failure rates, subsequent demoralization, and large-scale relapse into illiteracy. These set-backs are less strongly felt in situations of general mobilization of the society and political priorities for literacy, or at least concentrated mobilization of teachers and learners. In addition, a combination of local, national and international resources may make a considerable contribution to the relative success of the intended programme.

However, not only government efforts require assistance to provide their citizens with basic education. The role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in supporting or running literacy programmes also deserves the attention of the international community. The strength of many NGOs is their community identification and base. In the case of existing government literacy programmes, NGOs can perform a useful supplementary function by mobilizing teachers and learners and by performing a role in refining the overall programme to local conditions and needs. The NGO obviously assumes a completely different role where the state programme is very weak or non-existent. In such cases NGO programmes can play a major part in involving marginal groups in literacy education and related empowering activities.

PART II: Canadian Organization for Development through Education – CODE

INTRODUCTION

The mission of the Canadian Organization for Development through Education (CODE) is to enable people to learn by developing partnerships that provide resources for learning, encourage self-reliance and promote awareness and understanding. To this end, CODE sends carefully screened books, paper for local publishing, equipment, supplies and funds for educational projects to developing countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

The key to CODE's growth, particularly since 1980, has been partnerships. By developing partnerships with individual Canadians, with like-minded agencies in industrialized countries and promising organizations in developing countries, CODE is enabling people to learn.

Today, CODE ships approximately 600,000 books each year, most of which are new. It also ships $1.2 million (Cdn) worth of paper for indigenous publishing and allocates $1.0 million (Cdn) for educational projects, equipment and supplies.

At one point, CODE was involved in ninety countries throughout the developing world – from Latin America to the Pacific. During the late 1980s, CODE decided to focus its support in thirty-eight countries in order to make better use of its limited resources. Seventeen 'core' countries became eligible to receive books, paper, equipment and funds from CODE, while twenty-one 'Book Programme' countries became eligible to receive only books. The majority of these countries are in Africa.

A primary goal of developing partnerships with Third World organizations is to enable them to become self-sufficient so that they can eventually address all educational needs from within the country. It is without question a long-term goal, requiring commitment from all partners. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that education and literacy are the cornerstones of development.

The mission statement was developed only after much discussion, and clearly distinguishes between the final goal: *'enabling people to learn'* and the means to achieve that goal: *'developing partnerships that provide resources for learning, encourage self-reliance and promote awareness and understanding'*. While more emphasis will be placed on the means, it will be useful to examine briefly the intention behind the four words of the final goal: 'enabling people to learn'.

'ENABLING' VERSUS 'HELPING

Over the years, the connotations of 'helping' have become negative within the context of international development. Too often today, well-meaning and 'helpful' donors give inappropriate materials without enough consideration for the real needs of the Third World. Conversely, the conscious use of the word 'enabling' suggests a more valid form of partnership. When CODE enables *people in the Third World to learn, it is providing tools – books, paper, equipment and funds – requested by a local group, organization or government that is committed to implementing literacy and education programmes.*

'People' versus 'people in the Third World'

In keeping with the movement towards development education in industrialized countries, CODE identifies all the people with whom it has contact as constituents, including the general public, donors, volunteers, overseas partners, individuals and groups. CODE's mission is to enable *all* people to learn. For example, overseas constituents can learn how to become self-sufficient through literacy while Canadian constituents can learn about development in general, or, specifically, about how literacy and education can lead to self-sufficiency.

'Enabling people to learn' versus 'promoting literacy'

In the past, CODE has sometimes defined itself as a promoter of universal literacy. While it is true that literacy remains a key component of an individual's development, CODE increased the scope of its work by defining its mission as 'enabling people to learn'. This recognizes that *all* learning allows people to develop their potential and to participate fully in the social, political and economic development of the community. In this sense, CODE makes no distinction between formal and non-formal education with respect to its mission.

For most of its history, CODE has depended on a partnership with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). CODE has realized it is crucial to lessen its dependence on CIDA and to develop new partnerships with international agencies. For that reason, CODE has been pursuing relationships with organizations as diverse as the Canadian Teachers' Federation, the World Bank and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

In another kind of partnership, donors contribute towards an integrated project that addresses various community needs. Since 1987, for example, CODE has been providing funding for the literacy component of an integrated project in the drought-ridden region of Saraféré in Mali. CODE's contribution is used primarily to supply trainers and recording equipment to make books-on-tape in the local languages, as well as to establish village tape libraries. Villagers are encouraged to develop original written material from the transcripts of their own stories and will thus come to appreciate the value of the written word.

At the same time, with support from other partners, twenty-five hectares have been irrigated for rice cultivation and three additional hectares have been irrigated for vegetable gardens. As well, four market gardens will be established for women. The partners for this project include the Unitarian Service Committee, Solidarité Canada Sahel, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and a Malian non-governmental organization, l'Association malienne de Recherche-action pour le développement. In keeping with CODE's emphasis on long-term partnerships, the project was expanded in 1989.

CODE envisions that partnerships will provide human, financial and/or material resources for learning. For its part, CODE ensures that only *appropriate* resources are provided to its partners. Since its inception in 1959, CODE's programming has evolved substantially.

The book programme

Although CODE's programmes have diversified, books remain the cornerstone of its operations. An estimated 8.0 million books have been shipped by CODE since 1969.

Over the years, primary and secondary schools have remained the prime recipients. By far the most prominent users of CODE books are teachers, instructors and librarians, and adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18 years.

Without question, the Book Programme best illustrates the evolution of partnerships within CODE. In North America, books are donated by publishers, school boards and libraries. In 1989, 80% of the books acquired were new. The books are screened, sorted and packed by volunteers. Often, large shipments are transported free of charge by shipping companies. Once the books arrive in the recipient country, they are cleared through customs by a like-minded agency or by the local organization which distributes them on CODE's behalf.

However, partnerships were not always a priority for CODE. During the 1960s and 1970s, little emphasis was given to measuring the effectiveness of CODE's books, and there was little communication with recipients. An independent evaluation undertaken in 1979 revealed that an overwhelming majority of recipients

were, in fact, satisfied with the selection of books with respect to reading level, subject matter and attitude towards race. However, many commented that the books were often inappropriate for their culture. As a result of this evaluation, CODE introduced various measures to improve its effectiveness.

The paper support programme

In 1987, CODE completed a three-year pilot Paper Support Programme. An evaluation of the programme revealed that by supplying paper CODE enabled recipient organizations to publish more educational materials. At the same time, the evaluation revealed that many developing countries would continue to find it difficult to allocate their scarce foreign currency to the importation of paper.

Given the success of its pilot programme and the genuine need for assistance, CODE submitted a proposal for a multi-year Paper Support Programme to the Canadian International Development Agency in June 1987.

The general objective of the programme is to enable disadvantaged people in Third World countries to become and remain literate, and to learn skills that permit them to improve their living conditions. To accomplish this, CODE provides paper, printing supplies and training to Third World organizations which publish relevant learning materials. Publications of a primarily religious or political nature do not qualify for support.

Project funding

CODE's projects cover all aspects of education and literacy other than paper and books. Funding is available to support non-formal education, literacy and training programmes in areas that CODE has identified (in consultation with national authorities) as priority regions. Support is also available to publish educational

materials, including financial assistance and publishing-related equipment and supplies.

In both the Paper Support Programme and Project Funding divisions, CODE tries to support indigenous publishing, particularly the production of materials that reflect the diversity of a country's cultures. In keeping with CODE's emphasis on partnerships, regular progress reports are required from project recipients to maintain communication and to monitor a project's effectiveness.

In recent years, CODE has emphasized a more comprehensive and longer-term approach to assistance under the Paper Support Programme and Project Funding division. Although repeat funding to recipients can encourage dependency, it is often necessary in order to ensure the long-term viability of many Third World organizations and to support human resource development.

CONCLUSION

CODE's mission is to enable people to learn by developing partnerships that provide resources for learning, encourage self-reliance and promote awareness and understanding. The scope of this mission is great enough to allow CODE to meet changing educational needs and priorities in developing countries in the years ahead. However, with the budget cuts to Canada's official development assistance programmes, the need to develop partnerships with other international development agencies is becoming increasingly important.

While research suggests that literacy and education are the key components of any country's development strategy, the political, social, economic and environmental conditions are far too complex for simple solutions. CODE and other agencies would be naïve to believe that literacy alone will bring prosperity to the people of the Third World.

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